



How to cite this article:

Seifi, A., Mirkooshesh, A. H., & Razani, E. (2027). U.S. and Russian Public Diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 5(6), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.452>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 20 June 2026

Revision Date: 17 September 2026

Acceptance Date: 24 September 2026

First Publication Date: 25 September 2026

Final Publication Date: 01 November 2027

U.S. and Russian Public Diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Comparative Study

1. Amin. Seifi¹: Ph.D. Student, Department of International Relations, Sha.C., Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran
2. Amir Hooshang. Mirkooshesh^{2*}: Department of Political Science and International Relations, Sha.C., Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran
3. Ehsan. Razani³: Department of Political Science and International Relations, Sha.C., Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran

*corresponding author's email: am.mirkooshesh@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Public diplomacy, as a key instrument in great-power competition, has assumed heightened importance in the fragmented and crisis-prone environment of the Balkans. The present study aims to identify and compare the patterns, mechanisms, and strategies of public diplomacy employed by the United States of America and the Russian Federation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and employs a comparative case-study design, with data collected through documentary and library-based research methods. The findings indicate that the United States represents an institutionalized, nationwide, long-term model of public diplomacy centered on educational initiatives such as the Fulbright Program and LEAD, as well as the Public Affairs Offices of the U.S. Embassy, whereas Russia employs an identity-oriented, Republika Srpska-focused, short-term model based on Balkan-oriented media, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and anti-Western narratives. The United States enjoys a relatively high level of acceptance among Bosniaks and a segment of the Croat population but encounters resistance among Serbs. In contrast, Russia enjoys substantial acceptance among Bosnian Serbs, while its influence among Bosniaks and Croats remains highly limited. The study concludes that the effectiveness of public diplomacy in fragmented environments such as Bosnia and Herzegovina depends not only on material power resources but also on the ability to establish meaningful connections with the identities, collective memories, and historical experiences of target audiences. Accordingly, Iran can strengthen its public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of a long-term and balanced Balkan strategy by building on its comparative cultural, literary, and religious advantages while avoiding involvement in costly and protracted geopolitical rivalries.

Keywords: *Public diplomacy, United States of America, Russian Federation, Bosnia and Herzegovina, comparative study, Balkans, soft power*

Introduction

In recent years, public diplomacy has become an important component of foreign policy and competition among powers in the international arena. Alongside formal diplomacy and interstate relations, governments seek to influence existing perceptions and images of themselves and their foreign policies by communicating with foreign societies, elites, media, universities, civil society organizations, and younger generations (1).



Within this framework, public diplomacy is not merely the transmission of official government messages to foreign public opinion; rather, it is a communicative process through which governments seek to introduce and reproduce their preferred narratives, values, and perceptions within the social and political environment of the target country. Recent studies of public diplomacy in the Balkans likewise demonstrate that competition among external powers in this region is pursued at the level of narratives, public communication, and engagement with societal audiences (2).

According to D'Anieri (2024), the significance of public diplomacy becomes even more evident when the concept is examined in environments characterized by identity-based, ethnic, historical, and political cleavages. Under such conditions, the message of a foreign power is not necessarily received in the same way by all social groups; rather, it may be accepted, reinterpreted, or resisted depending on the historical experiences, ethnic and religious identities, political positions, and interests of different audiences. From this perspective, soft power is not limited merely to the general attractiveness of a country but may also become intertwined with the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts of its audiences (3).

The study by Cuppuleri and Velu Ashiku on Russia in the Western Balkans demonstrates that Russian soft power is multidimensional in nature and cannot be reduced solely to historical relations or Moscow's foreign policy; rather, ideological elements and divergent understandings of the international order also play important roles (4).

Bosnia and Herzegovina represents an important example of such an environment in the Western Balkans. Its multilayered political structure, ethnic and religious diversity, the consequences of the war of the 1990s, and continuing political disagreements concerning the status of central institutions and the country's constituent entities have created a context in which competition among external powers intersects with domestic developments. Bechev (2024) describes Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the arenas of competition between Russia and Western countries and demonstrates that domestic political and institutional divisions have provided a favorable environment for the expansion of external actors' roles. In this context, the United States of America and the Russian Federation constitute two important actors within Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and communicative environment, although the nature of their presence and the scope of their engagement with different segments of society are not identical. Owing to its historical role in the process of ending the Bosnian War and in shaping the post-Dayton order, the United States has occupied an important position in the country's political and security developments. In recent years, U.S. public engagement in Bosnia has also focused on issues such as youth, education, people-to-people connections, and democratic values (5).

For example, U.S. public diplomacy activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have included programs associated with education, English-language learning, youth leadership, and people-to-people engagement, including the LEAD program (2).

By contrast, Russia has employed different capacities to engage with Bosnia's political and social environment. These capacities are particularly evident in its relations with Republika Srpska and segments of the Bosnian Serb elite. Bechev (2024) demonstrates that Moscow's relations with the leadership of Republika Srpska have continued in recent years and that Russia has used these relations to preserve its role within Bosnia's political environment. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as indicating an equal degree of Russian influence throughout Bosnian society, because the country's political and social structure has resulted in varying levels of acceptance and resonance of Russian narratives among different groups. From a theoretical perspective, the importance of this issue can be explained by considering the role of identity, meaning, and discourse in international relations. From this perspective, external powers influence the international environment not only through material resources and

formal instruments but also through the production and dissemination of narratives that contribute to shaping audiences' understandings of concepts such as security, threat, sovereignty, identity, and political order. Accordingly, public diplomacy can be regarded as one of the arenas in which meaning is produced and transmitted through foreign policy. The study by Cuppuleri and Velu Ashiku (2024), focusing on elite and media discourses, likewise demonstrates that analyzing Russian soft power in the Balkans requires attention to the ways in which ideas and narratives are constructed and transmitted. Developments following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war have further increased the significance of this narrative competition. The war in Ukraine has brought issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, NATO, the European Union, Russia, and the European security order into sharper focus within the political environment of the Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, these developments have taken place under conditions in which political actors do not hold uniform positions regarding Russia and the war in Ukraine. Bechev (2024) similarly identifies the war in Ukraine as one of the factors that has intensified the geopolitical significance of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the competition between Russia and the West. Alongside traditional forms of communication, the digital sphere has also become an important arena of public diplomacy and narrative competition (5).

The study by Roško, Musladin, and Grkeš Tošović (2026) on the activities of the official social-media pages of Russian embassies in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro demonstrates that between 2019 and 2023, official communications by Russian embassies included, in addition to routine diplomatic messaging, narratives concerning Ukraine, NATO, the European Union, and the United States, as well as issues relating to Republika Srpska, the Dayton Agreement, and other regional disputes (6).

Based on an analysis of 6,996 Facebook posts, the study demonstrates that Russia's communication activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina continued after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (6).

Domestic studies concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina can be categorized into three principal areas: the role of the United States in the crisis of the 1990s, Iran's foreign policy in the Balkans, and analyses of the structure of the international system in the continuation or termination of the crisis. Parast-Tash et al. (2024), in another study entitled "The Confrontation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in the Balkan Region: A Case Study of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Crisis," drew on offensive realism and constructivism to explain the confrontation between Iran and the United States and argued that Iran's consistent approach of supporting Bosnian Muslims contributed to greater regional stability, whereas the passive U.S. approach contributed to the intensification and continuation of the crisis (7). Parast-Tash et al. (2024), in their study entitled "An Analysis of Iran's Foreign Policy in the Balkan Region: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina," analyzed Iran's foreign policy in the region and concluded that this policy was consistent with a constructivist approach and that the Balkans possesses considerable cultural, political, and economic capacities for the development of relations (8). Rahmani (2000), in a study entitled "The Consequences of United States Intervention in the Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina," analyzed the causes and consequences of U.S. intervention in the crisis. The findings indicated that during the initial years of the crisis, the United States deliberately refrained from intervention as part of a strategic approach and sought an appropriate opportunity to implement its hegemonic strategy in the post-Cold War era. Through this process, the United States was able to extend its hegemony in the region and demonstrate the necessity of its effective participation in European security arrangements; however, Bosnian Muslims, as the principal victims of the war, lost many of their vital interests as a consequence of signing the Dayton Agreement (9). Jokar (1997), in a study entitled "The International System and the Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina," examined

the role of the post-Cold War international-system structure in the continuation of the Bosnian crisis and demonstrated that the crisis did not end without the serious involvement of the United States as the hegemonic power and that European peace initiatives, as well as the measures undertaken by the Security Council and Russia, failed to achieve effective results (10). Foreign studies on U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina can likewise be classified into three categories: U.S. institutional mechanisms, Russia's identity-based and media linkages, and theoretical analyses of soft power and narrative competition. Korjenić (2026), in a study entitled "Characteristics and Dynamics of Hybrid Action in Bosnia and Herzegovina," analyzed hybrid threats facing the country and concluded that these threats operate in informational, political, economic, and cognitive domains and that traditional security mechanisms are incapable of responding to them effectively. The study emphasizes the need to strengthen cognitive and institutional resilience and to formulate a comprehensive counter-hybrid strategy tailored to the specific context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (11). Primorac (2025), in a study entitled "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ending a Nation-Building Failure," argues that despite billions of dollars in assistance, the United States has failed in the process of state-building in Bosnia and that the Office of the High Representative, through what the author characterizes as its almost authoritarian powers, has undermined the country's institutional maturation. The study proposes that the United States should discontinue its support for what the author describes as a centralized Bosniak-dominated state and restructure Bosnia into three federal units. At the geopolitical level, it further argues that the United States should draw Serbia away from Russia in order to reduce the influence of Russia, China, and Iran in the Balkans (12). Karar (2024), in a study entitled "Information Warfare in the Balkans: The Role of Serbia and the Comparative Analysis of Russia and the United States," concludes that Russia has expanded its informational influence in the Balkans through media outlets, anti-Western narratives, and historical-cultural ties with Serbia, whereas the United States has focused on strengthening independent media and civil society. Serbia, acting as a bridge for Russia, transmits Russian narratives to Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighboring countries. The study's principal conclusion is that information warfare in the Balkans constitutes an arena of geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the United States over control of narratives and the shaping of regional public opinion and domestic policies (2). Drygiel-Bielińska (2023), in a study entitled "A Fragile Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina," analyzes the country's persistent political and security challenges following the Dayton Agreement. The study concludes that peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains fragile and that the country's complex political structure, comprising two entities and three constituent peoples, facilitates institutional deadlock and the persistence of ethnic tensions. Geopolitical competition between the West and Russia in the Balkans, particularly following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, has further contributed to the fragility of this peace (13). Ronc (2022), in a study entitled "Bosnia and Russia: The Implication for European Security and US Interests," analyzes Russia's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its implications for European security and U.S. interests. The study concludes that Russia regards NATO expansion toward Bosnia as "provocative" and notes that the Russian Embassy in Sarajevo warned that Russia would respond should Bosnia join NATO, regarding such a step as hostile. According to the study, Russia's strategic objective is to preserve a "state of insecurity" in Bosnia, prevent the country from joining NATO and the European Union, and maintain its influence through information warfare and pro-Russian narratives in Republika Srpska. The principal conclusion of the study is that Bosnia's security crisis is attributable not only to Russian intervention but also to the continuation of European Union and NATO policies promoting what the author characterizes as unrealistic reforms, as well as the tacit support provided by certain EU member states, including Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia, to separatist forces in Bosnia (14). Garding (2021), in a

study entitled “Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U.S. Policy,” concludes that the United States played a key role in ending the Bosnian War through NATO leadership and mediation of the Dayton Agreement and continues to support the country’s territorial integrity and accession to NATO and the European Union. Russia, as one of the guarantors of the Dayton framework, supports Republika Srpska and its separatist leader, Dodik, and uses its influence to divert Western attention from the war in Ukraine. Nearly three decades after the war, Bosnia continues to face domestic and external challenges, including separatist threats and Russian influence, while retaining geopolitical importance for U.S. interests in the Western Balkans (14). From this perspective, the central problem of the present study is not merely to identify the instruments employed by the United States and Russia but also to examine how these instruments become linked to political and identity-based narratives and under what conditions they can influence audience perceptions. In other words, the effectiveness of public diplomacy cannot be explained solely on the basis of the actions of the message sender; rather, the interaction among the sender, narrative, communication channel, audience, and the sociopolitical context of the target country must also be considered. Despite recent studies concerning Russian influence in the Balkans and U.S. policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a substantial proportion of the existing literature has examined these two powers separately. Consequently, a simultaneous and comparative analysis of U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in a specific case such as Bosnia and Herzegovina can contribute to a more precise understanding of their differences in terms of objectives, narratives, instruments, audiences, and communication mechanisms. The significance of this comparison becomes even greater when Bosnia and Herzegovina is understood not as a socially integrated environment but as an arena comprising multiple groups and actors with divergent perceptions of the West, Russia, Europe, and the international order. Accordingly, the principal research question is as follows: What are the differences and similarities between U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of objectives, discursive narratives, instruments, audiences, and mechanisms of influence? Employing a qualitative approach, a descriptive–analytical method, and a comparative case-study design, the present article seeks to examine and compare these two patterns of public diplomacy within the political, social, and identity-based context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study’s novelty lies in placing narratives, instruments, audiences, and the domestic context within a single comparative framework rather than examining the communication policies of the two powers separately.

Research Method

In terms of its objective, the present study is applied research, while in terms of its nature and method, it is descriptive–analytical and was conducted using documentary and library-based methods. The objective is to identify and analyze the patterns, mechanisms, and strategies of public diplomacy employed by the United States of America and the Russian Federation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to comparatively examine these two patterns within the broader context of great-power competition in the Balkan region. Given the nature of the study, no statistical testing or quantitative modeling was intended. Instead, available information was collected, classified, and analyzed from library sources, official documents, reports issued by international institutions, and previous studies. The study population consisted of scholarly sources, official documents, and institutional reports concerning U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research sample was selected purposively and comprised peer-reviewed scholarly articles, governmental and institutional reports, embassy documents, and relevant case studies covering the period from the Dayton Agreement in 1995 through 2026. Data were collected

through library and documentary research. The sources used included scholarly articles published in reputable journals; governmental and institutional reports, including those issued by the U.S. Department of State, the Congressional Research Service, the Heritage Foundation, and the Gorchakov Foundation; official documents issued by embassies and international organizations; and case studies concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina. Data analysis was conducted using an analytical–comparative method. Within this framework, the mechanisms and public diplomacy strategies of each country were first identified and described separately, after which the two patterns were compared according to predetermined criteria. The comparative criteria included the type of instruments employed (institutional–educational versus identity-based–media instruments), audience scope (nationwide versus concentration on a particular ethnic group), temporal logic (long-term and gradual versus short-term and electoral), and the degree of acceptance among different social groups in Bosnia. Based on these criteria, the similarities and differences between the two patterns were subsequently identified, and their implications for understanding great-power competition in the Balkans were analyzed.

Findings

The findings derived from the examination of documents, institutional reports, and previous studies demonstrate that U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not represent two versions of a single model but rather two distinct and, to some extent, opposing models. These differences are rooted not merely in instruments and tactics but also in the underlying logic, audience scope, and temporal horizons of the two powers. The United States operates within an institutionalized, nationwide, and long-term framework focused on education, capacity-building, and institution-building, whereas Russia operates within an identity-based, concentrated, and short-term framework that relies on historical, religious, and media connections with a particular ethnic group. These differences can be observed and analyzed according to four specific criteria: the type of instruments, audience scope, temporal logic, and degree of acceptance among different social groups in Bosnia. Each of these four criteria is examined in detail below.

1. Type of Instruments: Institutional–Educational Versus Identity-Based–Media Instruments

The findings indicate that the United States has primarily relied on institutional and educational instruments in its public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Fulbright Program, as the oldest and most enduring mechanism, has sent dozens of Bosnian scholars to the United States since 1965, with an interruption during the war and its resumption in 1997. The LEAD program also operates in the areas of English-language education, youth leadership, and people-to-people engagement. The Public Affairs Offices of the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar function as institutional channels responsible for administering these programs and maintaining engagement with civil society. By contrast, Russia has relied on identity-based and media instruments. Relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church, support for media outlets such as RT Balkan and Sputnik, the organization of cultural events with identity-based content, such as Russian film festivals, and emphasis on anti-Western narratives constitute the principal pillars of Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia. Rather than establishing enduring educational institutions, Russia has concentrated on reinforcing identity-based solidarity with Republika Srpska.

2. Audience Scope: Nationwide Versus Concentration on a Single Ethnic Group

The second major finding is that the United States has extended the scope of its audiences across Bosnia and Herzegovina, albeit with a relative concentration on urban areas and civil society institutions. U.S. programs are implemented in both entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska—and among all three constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. The presence of U.S. Embassy offices in Banja Luka, a predominantly Serb area, and Mostar, a predominantly Croat area, indicates an effort to establish a presence throughout Bosnia. By contrast, Russia has concentrated its audience primarily on Republika Srpska and segments of the Bosnian Serb elite. Russian influence among Bosniaks and Croats is highly limited and is not uniform even among Serbs. Although this concentration on a particular ethnic group may produce considerable effectiveness in identity mobilization over the short term, it constrains the broader reach of Russian influence over the long term.

3. Temporal Logic: Long-Term and Gradual Versus Short-Term and Electoral

The third finding indicates that U.S. public diplomacy in Bosnia follows a long-term and gradual logic. The Fulbright Program and other educational initiatives constitute investments in future generations of Bosnian elites, the outcomes of which may emerge over periods of decades. This logic is consistent with the broader U.S. strategy of promoting democratic values and institution-building in the Balkans. By contrast, Russia follows a short-term and electorally oriented logic. Russian media activities in Bosnia intensify particularly during electoral periods. A prominent example is the reported 7.5-fold increase in the budget of “Balkans Media d.o.o.” in Belgrade in 2025, from USD 256,000 to USD 191 million, with the objective of influencing Bosnia’s October 2026 elections. During the 2025 Republika Srpska elections, Russia also used RT Balkan to promote Sava Karan, an ally of Dodik, as a pro-Russian candidate. Although such short-term logic may be effective at particular moments, it lacks institutional sustainability.

4. Degree of Acceptance Among Different Social Groups in Bosnia

The fourth finding demonstrates that the degree of acceptance of U.S. and Russian public diplomacy differs among Bosnia’s various social groups. U.S. messages enjoy relatively high acceptance among Bosniaks and segments of the Croat population because the United States is perceived as the mediator of the Dayton Agreement and a supporter of Bosnia’s territorial integrity. However, among Bosnian Serbs, U.S. messages encounter resistance and distrust because the United States is perceived as a principal supporter of measures directed against Republika Srpska and of sanctions against Dodik. By contrast, Russian messages enjoy considerable acceptance among Bosnian Serbs because Russia is perceived as the “historic supporter” of the Serbs and a defender of Republika Srpska against Western pressure. These messages, however, face strong resistance among Bosniaks and Croats. This finding is consistent with constructivism because it demonstrates that audience acceptance or resistance is a function of identity, collective memory, and historical experience rather than merely the material power of the message sender.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the four criteria discussed above, it can be concluded that U.S. public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents an institutionalized, nationwide, long-term, and education-based model, whereas Russian

public diplomacy represents an identity-based, concentrated, short-term, and media-based model. Neither model possesses absolute superiority in every respect. The U.S. model benefits from greater institutional sustainability and a broader scope but encounters identity-based resistance among Serbs, whereas the Russian model is effective in mobilizing Serb identity but has a limited sphere of influence and remains vulnerable to political changes. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that the success of public diplomacy in fragmented environments such as Bosnia depends not only on material power resources but also on the capacity to establish connections with the identity, collective memory, and historical experiences of audiences.

Policy Options and Lessons for Iranian Foreign Policy

The experience of U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that major powers, alongside official state-to-state relations, seek to shape audiences' understandings of concepts such as security, identity, sovereignty, and political order through engagement with societies, elites, media, universities, and younger generations. This competition at the level of narratives and public communication has operated particularly effectively in the fragmented and crisis-prone environment of the Balkans, where it may have greater influence than exclusively formal instruments. For Iran, public diplomacy can likewise be considered a complementary instrument and, under circumstances in which formal relations with some countries in the region are limited, potentially an alternative channel of engagement. Studies indicate that Russia in Bosnia has relied less on its general attractiveness than on identity-based, religious, and historical ties with Republika Srpska. This model is also relevant to Iran because Iran has historically maintained deep cultural connections with countries in the Balkans, while the Persian language previously enjoyed considerable prestige among intellectuals in the region. Parast-Tash et al. (2024) likewise concluded that Iran's foreign policy in the Balkans has been consistent with a constructivist approach and that the region possesses significant cultural, political, and economic capacities for the development of relations (8). Therefore, Iran can strengthen its public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina by drawing on shared cultural, literary, and religious heritage. The United States has established sustained and institutionalized engagement with Bosnian society through the Fulbright Program, the LEAD program, and the Public Affairs Offices of its embassy in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar. Russia has similarly developed a long-term network of relations through the Gorchakov Foundation, ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church, and local media. For Iran, establishing or strengthening sustainable cultural and educational institutions, including expanding Persian-language chairs at Bosnian universities, creating active cultural centers in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, and offering scholarships to Bosnian students, could contribute to the consolidation of long-term relations. Iran's experience in establishing a cultural center in Sarajevo after the war and launching the Sahar Balkan television network demonstrates its capacity for institutional engagement in the region, although this presence requires reconstruction and reinforcement through an approach adapted to contemporary conditions in Bosnia. One important lesson from Russia's experience in Bosnia is that its influence is not evenly distributed throughout Bosnian society and is concentrated primarily in Republika Srpska and among segments of the Bosnian Serb elite. Despite its broader presence, the United States has likewise encountered resistance in certain areas and among certain groups. For Iran, this experience indicates that public diplomacy should not be concentrated exclusively on a single ethnic or religious group. Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of three principal constituent peoples—Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats—and Iran can broaden the scope of its influence by diversifying its audiences, including through cooperation with civil society organizations, universities, and independent media throughout Bosnia, while avoiding being labeled as an actor aligned solely with one particular group. The study by Roško et al. (2026) demonstrates that

Russia has used the digital sphere, particularly Facebook, to communicate its narratives concerning NATO, the European Union, and Republika Srpska (6). The United States has also focused on strengthening independent media and civil society. For Iran, active and targeted engagement in Bosnia's digital environment through multilingual content in Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian, cooperation with influencers and local media, and the use of contemporary communication platforms could facilitate the more effective transmission of cultural and political narratives. The experience of Sahar Balkan as a Persian–Bosnian television network demonstrates Iran's capacity in this field, although such engagement should be redesigned in terms of language and format to correspond more closely to the preferences of younger Bosnian audiences. The experience of the United States and Russia in Bosnia further demonstrates that public diplomacy is a long-term process whose outcomes are not necessarily observable in the short term. Since the 1990s, Russia has gradually consolidated its relations with Republika Srpska and the Serbian Orthodox Church, while the United States, through sustained educational and cultural programs, has familiarized successive generations of Bosnian elites with American values and institutions. For Iran as well, public diplomacy in Bosnia should be understood as a long-term investment whose results may emerge over years and decades through the formation of generations of elites familiar with Iranian culture and perspectives. Although U.S.–Russian competition in Bosnia operates at the level of narratives and public communication, Iran does not necessarily need to enter into this competition directly. Iran's comparative advantages in Bosnia lie primarily in cultural, literary, religious, and educational domains rather than in geopolitical or information competition. Accordingly, Iran can consolidate its position in Bosnia by focusing on these advantages, including expanding Persian-language education, promoting faculty and student exchanges, developing scientific and academic cooperation, and introducing Iranian cultural and literary heritage, without becoming involved in protracted geopolitical rivalries. This approach is also consistent with the findings of Parast-Tash et al. (2024), who describe Iran's foreign policy in the Balkans as constructivist in orientation and based on cultural, political, and economic capacities (8). Another important lesson of the present study concerns the need to take audiences' historical experiences and collective memories into account. One reason for Russia's relative success in Republika Srpska is its connection with the collective memory and historical identity of Serbs. By contrast, the United States has drawn on its historical role in ending the war and facilitating the Dayton Agreement. For Iran, attention to the collective memory and historical experiences of Bosnian Muslims, particularly Iran's support for Bosnian Muslims during the 1992–1995 war, may similarly provide a useful point of reference for public diplomacy. Nevertheless, this historical experience should be reinterpreted sensitively and in accordance with contemporary conditions in Bosnia to avoid creating unintended political sensitivities. In conclusion, the experience of U.S. and Russian public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that success in this sphere requires a combination of sustainable institution-building, engagement with audience identity and collective memory, active participation in the digital sphere, and sensitivity to ethnic and religious diversity. For Iran, drawing lessons from these experiences does not imply copying U.S. or Russian methods; rather, it entails the strategic use of Iran's own comparative cultural and historical advantages while avoiding involvement in protracted geopolitical competition. By drawing on shared cultural, literary, and religious capacities and establishing sustainable educational and communication institutions, Iran can strengthen its public diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of a long-term and balanced strategy toward the Balkans.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

1. Mirkoshesh AH. Public Diplomacy: Theory and Practice. Tehran: University of Tehran Academic Jihad Press; 2019.
2. Karar IG, editor Information Warfare in the Balkans: The Role of Serbia and the Comparative Analysis of Russia and the United States. 4th International Balkan Studies Congress Proceedings; 2024.
3. D'Anieri PJ. International Politics: Power and Purpose in Global Affairs: Mobin Andisheh; 2024.
4. Cuppuleri A, Veliu Ashiku L. The Multidimensional Soft Power of Illiberal States: Russia in the Western Balkans. Nationalities Papers. 2024;52(4):761-81. doi: 10.1017/nps.2023.25.
5. Bechev D. Between the EU and Moscow: How Russia Exploits Divisions in Bosnia. 2024.
6. Roško M, Musladin M, Grkeš Tošović I. Digital Diplomacy and FIMI-Related Communication: Russian Embassy Facebook Activity in the Adriatic-Balkan Region. Politička misao. 2026;63(2):183-211. doi: 10.20901/pm.63.2.07.
7. Parast-Tash V, Goudarzi M, Jafari-Nejad M. The Confrontation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in the Balkan Region: A Case Study of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Crisis. Islamic Revolution Research. 2024;13(50).
8. Parast-Tash V, Goudarzi M, Jafari-Nejad M. An Analysis of Iran's Foreign Policy in the Balkan Region: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Journal of Contemporary Research on Islamic Revolution. 2024;6(21):18-38. doi: 10.22059/jcir.2024.371064.1595.
9. Rahmani M. The Consequences of United States Intervention in the Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Imam Sadiq University; 2000.
10. Jokar AA. The International System and the Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina: University of Tehran; 1997.
11. Korjenić K. Characteristics and Dynamics of Hybrid Action in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Društvene i humanističke studije. 2026;11(1 (29)):1241-60.
12. Primorac M. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ending a Nation-Building Failure. Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, 2025.
13. Drygiel-Bielińska M. A Fragile Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Politics and Security of Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary Challenges: Springer International Publishing; 2023. p. 197-214.
14. Ronc N. Bosnia and Russia: The Implication for European Security and US Interests. Journal of Peace and War Studies. 2022;4:148-60.

